



## Commonwealth of Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet

For Immediate Release

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### **Corrections Officers to Get Pay Raises to Retain Staff, Increase Recruiting**

**FRANKFORT, KY (May 21, 2015)** -- The Kentucky Department of Corrections will enhance its compensation for correctional officers and other hazardous duty staff under a plan announced this week to stabilize the workforce in state prisons.

Responding to high staff vacancies and turnover rates, Gov. Steve Beshear approved the plan that raises pay for security staff; moves institutional hazardous duty, non-security staff to 40-hour work weeks; and implements a monthly stipend for members of the correctional emergency response teams, or CERT.

A review by the Personnel Cabinet revealed that Kentucky's corrections officers and hazardous duty workers were paid at below-market rates compared to nearby states. The low pay scale contributes to staff turnover and difficulty hiring new officers. Corrections officer turnover rates have been measured as high as 66.7 percent.

"Our corrections staff work under stressful, dangerous conditions, and as our economy improves, it's understandable that many seek opportunities in less hazardous environments," Gov. Beshear said. "But the domino effect of that is that we are faced with high vacancies, mandatory overtime, and a revolving door of experience levels. Left unchecked, these conditions could worsen into a threat to public safety. I've taken this action to help recruit and retain correctional employees in order to maintain safety and security not only for our communities, but also for the staff and inmates within our corrections system."

Under the new wage structure, the starting salary for correctional officers will be upped by 13.1%, raising the entrance pay from \$23,346 to \$26,400, with higher increases for sergeants, lieutenants and captains. The new structure also sets across-the-board salary increases for existing staff, and will impact security staff at the Kentucky Correctional Psychiatric Center, which is run by the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

All institutional hazardous duty, non-security staff will be converted to a 40-hour work week from their current 37.5-hour schedule – the equivalent of a 6.67% increase in compensation.

And finally, CERT members, who respond to incidents, riots, cell extractions, mass searches, or disturbances in prisons, will receive a \$50 monthly maintenance stipend, to compensate them for the additional training and responsibilities required.

Justice Secretary J. Michael Brown said the Commonwealth is already spending a significant amount of money – about \$3.5 million a year -- in mandatory overtime costs, and nearly \$900,000 in ongoing training costs, and that it is better to invest those funds in a stable workforce.

Taking into account expected savings in overtime costs, the salary adjustments and other enhancement are estimated to cost \$12.4 million annually.

The new salary structure will take effect June 16<sup>th</sup>; the 40-hour work week schedule and CERT stipend will be effective Aug. 16<sup>th</sup>.